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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a new paradigm for urban education, a school, business, and university collaboration in Cleveland (Ohio). Participating in the partnership are John F. Kennedy High School, the East Ohio Gas Company, and the Graduate Program in Administration and Supervision at John Carroll University in University Heights (Ohio). The paper focuses on three aspects of the program: (1) the additional competencies that the business partner and university associate brought to the school; (2) the synergistic influence of the business partner and the university associate on the thinking of the principal and other staff members; and (3) the resources made available to the school by the business partner and the university associate to do things that otherwise would not be done. The paper describes how helpful these opportunities were to building the spirit of the staff, students, and parents, but also how they helped a new concept for school structure and operation to emerge. Also described here is the implementation of a focused approach to the improvement of students' learning using a 5-stage staff development model, a planning team, and a pilot group of 20 teachers and administrators from the school enrolled in a 4-week summer academy to prepare themselves to implement a school improvement plan. Included are 12 references. (JB)

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School-Business-University Collaborative:

A New Paradigm for Urban Education

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The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1989) indicates that the word "paradigm" means "model" or "pattern." Kuhn (1962), who is largely responsible for the term's wide application today, used it to describe what he called a "paradigm shift." For him a "paradigm shift" was the movement from one set of beliefs to explain natural phenomena to the acceptance of another set to explain the same phenomena. Until this shift was completed scientists were able to either ignore or distort data to fit their existing "paradigm," and often the shift would take years to achieve. A classic example was the movement of scientists from the belief that the sun rotated around the earth to the belief that the earth rotated around the sun.

All paradigmatic changes, however, are not of this weight. Reynolds (1971) discussed "paradigm variations," which are "refinement of details or variations in emphasis, not changes in the basic conceptualization of phenomena associated with the paradigm" (pp. 32-33). It is this notion of "paradigm variation" that is used in this paper relative to urban education.

Urban schools operate today largely with the same structures that have been in place for at least 75 years. At the elementary level there is a principal, a secretary, and 20 to 30 teachers, each with her/his own classroom. The physical arrangement is often referred to as the "egg

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crate" design because the rooms are arranged in that fashion off of the hallways. Usually there is a "primary hall/wing" and an "upper elementary hall/wing." At the high school level schools typically are organized around a set of subject-related departments and a seven- or eight-period day, with each period 40 or 45 minutes in length.

These structures, which influence the ways in which people view their roles and how they interact with each other and the school, have been perpetuated from one generation to another. Now they are so deeply set in the culture of American schooling that the introduction of change is often rejected as "not fitting in." While its ineffectiveness is due to a combination of factors, most of which are related to resources (Peirce, 1991), it is worsened by its power to prevent designated school leaders from finding the time, people, and money to acquire other viewpoints about how the schools could be functioning.

Given this situation and using Reynolds' idea of a "paradigm variation," a new paradigm is proposed for introducing broad-based, significant improvement into urban schools. For example, John F. Kennedy High School, one of 12 comprehensive high schools in the Cleveland Public Schools, has significantly altered the prevailing paradigm by becoming part of a school-business-university collaborative dedicated to improving the academic performance the of school's students. The business partner is The East Ohio Gas Company, a member of Cleveland's "Education Partners," a consortium of major businesses in the greater Cleveland area organized to provide assistance to the Cleveland Public Schools. The university is John Carroll, and specifically, its Graduate Program in Administration and Supervision. Working cooperatively with the staff, faculty, and parents they constructed a strategic plan that resulted in the school's refocusing its resources on the few significant process variables that have been shown to have a positive impact on learning outcomes (Good and Brophy, 1986).

While a complete discussion of how this "paradigm variation" was operationalized is too extensive for this paper, three major aspects of it will be addressed:

1. The additional competencies that the business partner and university associate brought to the school.
2. The synergistic influence of the business partner and the university associate on the thinking of the principal and other staff members.
3. The resources made available to the school by the business partner and the university associate to do things that otherwise would not be done.

The first of these three, providing additional competencies, was a set of understandings, skills, and experiences that were not available to the school leadership in the beginning. Both the business representative and the university associate had backgrounds that complemented the principal and her staff, providing them with the opportunity to function as internal consultants. As a result they were able to interact with the school's personnel to produce a plan for improving students' academic performance.

The second manifestation of the "paradigm variation" resulted from the development of a strategic plan for the school. This collaborative effort was one of the first major steps that combined the principal, the business partner, and the university. In the beginning, the principal did not have some of the critical knowledge or skills needed to devise such a plan for the school, but she willing entered into the planning process with the other two. Her role was twofold: (1) to create the shared vision that represented the school's "desired future" and (2) to motivate the staff to become involved. This arrangement became synergistic, and a powerful planning force for school improvement.

As a result, the third aspect of the "paradigm variation" took shape: A variety of opportunities for staff were made available by the business partner's access to resources that the school did not have. For instance, planning sessions were held in the business partner's facilities in downtown Cleveland, which was a pleasant difference from holding them at the school. In addition, off-site, weekend retreats, that included students and parents, were provided by the business partner. The university, too, made its facilities available, resulting in some of the training being held there -- and with graduate credit for those desiring it at a fraction of the normal cost ($75/hr. versus $300/hr.).

These opportunities were enormously helpful in building the spirit of the staff, students, and parents as they worked together to improve their school. But more importantly, a new way of conceptualizing the structure and operation of the school emerged. They accepted their responsibility for the success of their students and found ways to be more effective. For example, a computerized performance indicator model, using data which the school already possessed, was cooperatively designed. This program has been one of the most productive and replicated results of this new paradigm.

An important outcome of this effort has been the implementation of a highly focused approach to the improvement of students' learning. Using a five-stage staff development model (Smyth, 1984), the planning team and a pilot group of twenty teachers and administrators from the school enrolled in a four-week summer academy to prepare themselves to implement a school improvement plan. The first three weeks of the training were directed at three components from the research on urban schools:

1. Developing an outcome-based curriculum to be used in combination with "effective schools" (Spady, 1987; Lezotte & Jacoby, 1990).
2. Implementing a mastery learning model (Guskey, 1985).
3. Learning to use an instructional model built around the teacher as decision-maker (Cummings, 1990).

The fourth week was devoted to learning the techniques of reflective practice as implemented through a coaching model utilizing clinical supervision (Hunter, 1990).

As stated earlier a five-stage professional development model, brought to the attention of the staff by the university associate, was an important part of the strategic plan. As implemented at John F. Kennedy High School it included:

Stage One

"Instructional design (Seels & Glasgow, 1990)," "effective schools' research" (Lezotte & Jacoby, 1990), "mastery learning" (Carroll, 1963; Bloom, 1981; Guskey, 1985) and "the essential elements of instruction" (Cummings, 1990) were combined into a four-week summer academy. Basic knowledge and skills related to curriculum and instruction comprised the first three weeks, and the fourth week developed the coaching skills of those who wanted to be peer assistants to other teachers, i.e., "training-of-trainers" concept. Each participant completed this stage with at least one unit of a 1991-92 course converted to an outcome-based curriculum and agreed to use the essential elements of instruction (EEI) in teaching it.

Stage Two

Participants returned to their schools to begin practicing the skills that they had learned. To assist themselves they formed into a self-directed support team (MAP -- "Mastery Academy Project"), meeting twice monthly on their own time to develop further their understanding, skills, and attitudes toward the model, their students, and themselves as effective teachers, with this last point relating to increased teacher efficacy.

Stage Three

After the first month of school, they began to meet in their support group to share their experiences, including video tapes of their lessons. Issues were raised and solutions were sought -- and in most cases found. Peer coaching was part of this model, with each person choosing a coach from within the group. The business partner, the university associate, and administrators visited classes to offer support, encouragement, and feedback on use of the skills contained in the model. The university associate continued providing developmental activities in support of increasing their competencies relative to the model.

Stage Four

During this stage they continued to practice their skills, becoming more knowledgeable about what works; what the barriers were. For instance, they saw a low level of aspiration on the part of many students as being a major barrier to their functioning at ever higher levels. This barrier was not so much an educational, instructional,

or curricular one as it was a psychological one having to do with students' styles of interacting with the world. Since this issue is related to attribution theory and locus of control, plans are being made for staff to acquire a better understanding of these factors. Using focus-group techniques , randomly selected small groups of students will be interviewed. Again, the business partner's company has a large personnel and marketing departments that can provide resources for conducting these interviews.

Stage Five

The final stage, which they are beginning to enter, requires the participants to present what they have learned to the entire faculty. It is a celebration of their year-long effort, with the entire faculty joining them in a congratulatory expression of support. Also, it is an ending and a beginning for both the pilot group and the larger faculty. The former group now is empowered to move ahead with their students to help them become more successful in school. To the latter group it says, "If you did it, we can too!" Experiencing this stage helps the initial participants to move from simply acquiring knowledge of the skills to internalizing them -- to making them part of their natural teaching repertoire.

Finally, the notion of leadership for the high school is changing at John F. Kennedy. While the principal remains the school's designated leader, the partner and university associate have been accepted by the staff, parents, students, and support staff as being able to provide needed resources that help them to be more effective. Now the staff is beginning to develop a desired independence as they engage in continuous improvement and move to new paradigm for John F. Kennedy High School.

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